

Key projects reform Finnish education



The Finnish Government aims to reform the society and to reinforce economic growth through five strategic priorities. One of these is competence.

The world around us is changing rapidly, and education, too, must evolve to meet the needs of the future. The objective of these reforms is to raise the level of competence, expertise and education in Finland, making it possible to support the changes in society and enabling equal opportunities. This objective is to be promoted through six key projects.

We want to ensure that in the future Finland is a country where people are keen to learn new things all the time.

1. NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND DIGITAL MATERIALS TO COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS

The objective of the key project is to make Finland a model country for modern and inspiring learning. Basic education will be brought into the 2020s by increasing the use of digital learning methods, teaching an active way of life and experimenting with different languages.

Digital learning and new learning environments outside the classroom also require a new kind of pedagogical approach. In order to support teachers' ability to take advantage of this new

approach, continuing professional education and training will be provided. All digital materials and services in schools must be pedagogically appropriate and stimulate the children's learning. Teachers are encouraged to innovate, and best practices will be shared.

The key project also promotes children's activities, as physical inactivity of the population is a problem in all wealthy countries. The goal is that each comprehensive school pupil would exercise for at least one hour each day. The operational method of the Finnish Schools on the Move project, launched in 2010, has already reached more than 70 % of all Finnish schoolchildren. The method promotes sitting less during lessons and exercising more during break times. The goal is not to increase the number of PE classes, but instead to encourage learning through being active during other classes and break times.

2. REFORM OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

This reform updates the entire vocational education and training (VET) by 2018.

In the future, work life requires a new kind of competence, while there are fewer financial resources available for education. VET has to respond more swiftly to the changes in work life and operating environment and to adapt to individual competence needs.

VET for young people and adults will be consolidated, forming a single entity with its own steering and regulation system and financing model. The current supply-oriented approach will be refocused into a demand-driven approach. Education will be competence-based and customer-oriented: Each student will be offered the possibility to design an individually appropriate path to finishing an entire qualification or a supplementary skill set. The primary importance is on what the student learns and is able to do. Digital learning environments and new approaches to pedagogy (e.g. modern simulators) will have a larger role in the future of learning. Learning in the workplace will be increased.

In Finland, VET is organised by different types of education providers: municipalities, joint municipal authorities, the state and the private sector. An authorisation to provide education is required. In the future, education is regulated through a single

authorisation license, and education providers will have increased freedom in organising their activities.

The reform includes examining the education provider network. VET will be available throughout the country in the future as well. The ministry will ensure that all education providers have sufficient professional and financial resources to provide education. Education providers are encouraged towards voluntary mergers.

There are up to 370 different vocational qualifications available in Finland. In the future, the number of qualifications will decrease, and qualification content will be broadened. This supports designing individual study paths and enables more rapid responses to the changing competence needs in work life.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF TERTIARY EDUCATION

The government also hopes to achieve longer work careers and flexible study paths for higher education. Higher education institutions will reform their student selection processes in order to decrease the number of gap years after upper secondary education and to encourage students to begin their studies earlier. The intention is to increase the significance of matriculation examination results in student selections.

In the future, higher education institutions will offer education around the year. Emphasising a student-centered approach will also speed up studies. In addition, recognition of prior learning will be improved, and work life orientation and teaching of entrepreneurial skills will be increased.

The use of electronic devices as teaching aids is already well-established at Finnish higher education institutions, but there is plenty of work to be done in taking further advantage of digitalisation and in developing the competence of teaching staff in digitalisation. Digitalisation enables increasing the flexibility of study paths and facilitates more cooperation between higher

education institutions and with secondary education institutions.

4. ACCESS TO ART AND CULTURE WILL BE FACILITATED

This key project improves the accessibility of basic art education and children's culture in the different parts of the country and promotes the creativity of children and young people. The measures increase the number of arts and crafts classes in connection to school days and facilitate early childhood education aged children to participate in art and culture, both as makers and viewers. The objective is to reinforce the sense of belonging in the school community and increase children's equal opportunities to have hobbies. As a part of this key project, school pupils were asked what they would like to do recreationally in connection to their school day. Close to 120,000 children participated in the survey. New recreational classes will be established based on the pupils' wishes.

In addition, the key project aims to improve the accessibility of art and culture, thereby promoting the beneficial effects art has on well-being. The purpose is to create an operational method that helps facilitate the procurement of art and culture-related services in the social and health care system. More services from different areas of art and culture will be offered, and they will be increasingly taken advantage of in the care and customer services provided by social and healthcare services (hospitals, services for older people, and child welfare, for example).

5. COOPERATION BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND BUSINESS LIFE WILL BE STRENGTHENED TO BRING INNOVATIONS TO THE MARKET

The goal is to use the resources of science and research in a more efficient and effective way and to promote the growth of Finnish education exports. Enhancing research aims to contribute to new growth to Finland.

The division of work and cooperation between higher education institutions and research institutions will be made clearer. Higher education institutions will clarify their profiles, focusing on the top of international research potential. The profiling and work division of higher education institutions, as well as the impact and commercialisation of research, will be made more effective. The portion of competitive funding will be increased in the financing of higher education institutions.

There is also demand for Finnish education abroad. In order to meet this demand, the opportunities of educational export are promoted in all levels of education. From 1 August 2017, tuition fees for higher education will be introduced for students arriving from outside the European Union and EEA. The higher education institutions have already had the option to charge tuition from the beginning of 2016. Students arriving from outside the EU or EEA who are at a financial disadvantage will be supported through a separate scholarship system.

6. YOUTH GUARANTEE TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE

We Finns want to ensure that all young people remain active participants in our society. It is important that a young person can access all the necessary services through a single point of contact.

A place to study is guaranteed to everyone finishing comprehensive school. In addition, support must be available for young people who cannot find a suitable study place right after comprehensive school. Such support is available through the Ohjaamo advisory service, outreach youth work and workshops coaching young people for the next transitions in life. We can succeed by developing the youth guarantee in cooperation with operators in the public, private and third sector. We also need young people to actively participate in planning and improving the services they use. ●